



Montana Associated Students of the Montana University System

March 18, 2009

Madame Chair Grinde and Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Trevor Hunter and I have the privilege of serving as the President of the Montana Associated Students (MAS) of the Montana University System. For those of you who may not be aware, MAS is the combined student governments of the eleven campuses of the Montana University System, representing over 40,000 students. MAS advises the Board of Regents regarding matters that directly and indirectly affect Montana students as well as works collaboratively with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

I write to you today to express my opposition to Senate Bill 80, short titled "An Act to Allow for the Election of the Board of Regents". It is my opinion, as a student of the Montana University System for which the Board of Regents provides for, that allowing for the election of such positions would be to eliminate the true mission of the Board—the students—and force politics, divisiveness, and strife into regularly informed, qualified, and congenial decisions. I have been involved with student government for the past four years and I have attended most, if not all, Board of Regents meetings in that time. It has been my personal experience that the Board, as appointed trustees of higher education, have acted professionally and in the best interests of the students of Montana.

I understand the intent of this bill to allow the Regents to be accountable to the voters, but I would argue that the Regents are already very accountable to their largest constituency: the students. Therefore, passing this bill effectively cuts out the real trustees of higher education—the students—who pay for the majority of the University's operations. An appointed position guarantees that the individual selected by the Governor will be experienced, knowledgeable, and qualified to serve as a member, whereas an elected position removes that guarantee. Furthermore, as I am sure all of you are aware, there is one member of the Board who is a student. This bill would force any student who desired to serve their peers in this capacity to try and mount a statewide campaign to try and be elected, all the while trying to be successful as a student. This bill makes it impractical and undesirable to 'run' for Regent as a student.

Nevada is currently the only state with an elected Board of Regents and it is regularly muddled in special interest politics. Please do not jeopardize the independence and trust we as students have in the Board of Regents by allowing partisan politics and dividing policy to become the new standard in higher education governance. **I respectfully urge a NO vote on Senate Bill 80.** Thank you for your careful consideration.

Regards,

Trevor Hunter
MAS President

*University of Montana
Missoula, MT*

*Montana State University
Bozeman, MT*

*Dawson Community College
Glendive, MT*

*Great Falls College
of Technology—MSU
Great Falls, MT*

*Montana Tech
Butte, MT*

*Montana State University
Billings, MT*

*Flathead Valley Community College
Kalispell, MT*

*Helena College of
Technology—UM
Helena, MT*

*Montana Western
Dillon, MT*

*Montana State University -
Northern
Havre, MT*

*Miles City Community College
Miles City, MT*